

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 /026 W

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R 231800 Z MAR 73 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7955
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 2305

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR XF US SY

SUBJECT: US/ SYRIAN RELATIONS

DEPARTMENT PASS USINT CAIRO

REFS: ROME 2221 (NOTAL); STATE 035079 (NOTAL)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SYRIANS HAVE STIFFENED THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH US BECAUSE THEIR HOPES FOR MORE BALANCED US ATTITUDE TOWARD AREA SITUATION HAVE BEEN FRUSTRATED BY APPARENT FULL US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL AS EVIDENCED DURING MEIR VISIT TO WASHINGTON. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MARCH 23 RESPONSIBLE ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL CONVEYED SUBSTANCE OF TELEGRAM RECEIVED FROM ITALIAN CHARGE' BIOLATO IN DAMASCUS REPORTING MARCH 19 CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER ISMAIL. CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE AT SAME BIOLATO/ ISMAIL MEETING DURING WHICH US DEMARCHE ON ARAB GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT FOR BSO WAS MADE (ROME REFTEL).

3. BIOLATO TOOK THE OCCASION TO DISCUSS US/ SYRIAN DIALOGUE BASING
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HIS PRESENTATION ON MATERIAL PROVEDED IN STATE REFTTEL. BIOLATO EMPHASIZED FAVORABLE EFFECT SUCH DIALOGUE COULD HAVE ON DEVELOPMENT

OF SYRIAN/ US RELATIONS IN THAT IT COULD RESULT IN MORE RELAXED RELATIONS AT LEAST IN AREAS NOT REPEAT NOT DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN USG AND SARG.

4. ISMAIL REPLIED THAT ALTHOUGH SARG INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING CONTACTS WITH USG THROUGH ITALIAN EMBASSY DAMASCUS OR IN OTHER WAYS, HE FELT OBLIGED AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME TO EXPRESS "INDIGNATION" OF SYRIAN GOVERNMENT FOR RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF MILITARY SUPPLIES, PARTICULARLY PHANTOM AND SYKHAUK AIRCRAFT TO BE PROVIDED BY US TO ISRAEL IN CONNECTION WITH VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER MEIR TO US. ISMAIL SAID THAT US STATEMENTS WHICH MAINTAINED THAT THESE SUPPLIES ARE DESIGNED TO REESTABLISH BALANCE OF FORCES IN AREA ARE "REDICULOUS" SINCE THEY IMPLIED PREVIOUS MILITARY SITUATION UNBALANCED IN FAVOR OF ARABS.

5. ISMAIL ASSERTED THAT SARG DOES NOT OBJECT TO DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES OF CAIRO SUCH AS ISMAIL VISIT TO WASHINGTON, BUT CONTINUES TO BE "COMPLETELY SKEPTICAL" ON THE POSSIBILITY OF FINDING A SOLUTION IN THIS WAY SINCE "FACTS DEMONSTRATED THAT VISIT OF ISMAIL AND HUSSEIN HAVE NOT REPEAT NOT ACHIEVED ANY FORWARD STEP."

6. ISMAIL CONTINUED THAT GIVEN THESE SARG VIEWS, IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO THINK IN RELAXED TERMS ABOUT RELATIONS WITH US, AT LEAST AS LONG AS US POSITION OF TOTAL SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL IS NOT REPEAT NOT MODIFIED. ISMAIL RECALLED "WITH CERTAIN BITTERNESS" HIS OCTOBER CONVERSATION WITH SISCO AT UNGA, SINCE THEIR DISCUSSION HAD INSPIRED HOPE THAT THERE WAS POSSIBILITY OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA SITUATION THAT WOULD COME ABOUT BY A REALISTIC US COMMITMENT WHICH WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE "LEGITIMATE ASPIRATIONS" OF THE ARABS.

7. IN COMMENTARY PARAGRAPH OF MESSAGE, BIOLATO SAID THAT GIVEN TONE OF ISMAIL'S REMARKS, HE DEEMED IT PREFERABLE TO AVOID DETAILED DISCUSSION OF US VIEWS RE IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH SARG, PARTICULARLY SUBJECT OF TREATMENT OF US CITIZENS BY SYRIAN AUTHORITIES. BIOLATO STATED THAT HE WOULD TAKE UP SUBJECT AGAIN AT OPPORTUNE TIME WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER RIFAI WHO HAD SUPERVISORY BRIEF FOR US AFFAIRS.

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8. BIOLATO COMMENTED FURTHER THAT SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD US HAD CONSIDERABLY HARDENED IN AFTERMATH OF MEIR VISIT TO WASHINGTON. HE NOTED THAT SPECIFIC AND DIRECT ATTACKS ON US HAVE REAPPEARED IN SPEECHES OF SARG OFFICIALS AND ALMOST DAILY IN SYRIAN PRESS. BIOLATO CONTRASTED THIS HARSH ANTI- US TONE WITH PREVIOUS TREATMENT WHICH HE SAID WAS CHARACTERIZED BY A " CERTAIN RESTRAINT". BIOLATO REMARKED THAT ANTI- US PRESS TREATMENT AND OFFICIAL STATEMENTS ARE TRULY INDICATIVE OF DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT OF SARG OVER AREA SITUATION WHICH IT BELIEVES HAS DEVELOPED FAVORABLY ONLY FOR ISRAEL. VOLPE

NOTE BY OC/ T: NOT PASSED CAIRO.

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** EXDIS

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts:
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 MAR 1973
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: garlanwa
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973ROME02305
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730339/aaaaiimg.tel
Line Count: 131
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 JUL 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30-Jul-2001 by willialc>; APPROVED <07-Sep-2001 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> srp 971230
Subject: US/ SYRIAN RELATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, US, XF, n/a
To: SECSTATE WASHDC
SS INFO AMMAN
BEIRUT
BONN
MULTIPLE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

